



AFSCME

American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees, AFL-CIO

April 8, 2004

VIA ELECTRONIC FILING

Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary
Federal Communications Commission
445 Twelfth Street, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20554

Re: WT Docket No. 02-55

Dear Chairman Powell:

On behalf of the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME), representing 1.6 active members and retirees, I would like to express our concern regarding the ability of our public safety workers -- emergency medical personnel, police and firefighters -- to communicate in times of emergencies. We urge your agency to immediately address and resolve the serious issue of radio interference in the 800 MHz spectrum band used by public safety officials throughout the country.

First responders, including members of our Union, put their lives on the line everyday, responding to fires, criminal activity and other emergencies affecting our homeland security. Their ability to arrive quickly is particularly critical to our retirees and other senior citizens who rely more heavily on emergency services. Unfortunately, this quick response is at risk because public safety radio interference is dramatically on the rise.

As you know, the fundamental cause of this interference is the close proximity and incompatibility of public safety, private wireless, and commercial wireless operations within the 800 MHz band of radio spectrum. Public safety communications are affected significantly since most of their communications infrastructure operates within the 800 MHz band.

The plan pending before the Commission that would rearrange first responders' and commercial wireless' radio frequencies without any costs to taxpayers is our best chance to solve the issue of interference while enhancing public safety and addressing the concerns of senior citizens.

This plan, known as the Consensus Plan, moves to solve public safety radio interference from commercial systems and also provides public safety with additional 800 MHz spectrum, thus reducing congestion.

We need this kind of proactive plan to solve this problem on a nationwide basis. Lives are at stake when communications are garbled during medical emergencies, accidents, and other tragedies.

We understand the Commission is considering supporting such an approach. On behalf of our members and their families and all of our nation's first responders, we urge you to do so.

Sincerely,

Director of Legislation